United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Wildlife Services

FY 2004

WILDLIFE SERVICES—NEW YORK

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in New York

Every day, New York residents, industries, organizations, municipalities and agencies call on New York Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and professional strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

New York is a diverse ecological mix of urban and suburban settings and agricultural and forested environments that are also home to nearly 19 million people. New York State has 47,223 square miles of land with another 7,000 square miles of inland water. Accordingly, WS works to reduce public safety risks and property damage by managing wildlife populations at airports, protecting domestic pets and livestock from rabies, and guarding natural resources such as rare species and fisheries from bird depredation.

Reducing the Occurrence of Raccoon Rabies—Raccoon rabies first appeared in New York in 1990. The disease quickly spread and is now present throughout most of the State. In 1998, WS initiated a cooperative, multi-year oral vaccination program in an attempt to curtail the northward spread of rabies. WS is leading this cooperative effort with the New York State Department of Health, Cornell University's Diagnostic Laboratory, and other agencies to distribute oral rabies vaccines (ORV) in critical areas of the State. Each vaccine is encased in a bait attractive to raccoons. When a raccoon bites into the bait, a pouch containing the vaccine is punctured, vaccinating the raccoon. In 2001, WS initiated a study focusing on raccoon populations and the efficacy of the ORV baiting program along the shoreline of the St. Lawrence River in Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties in northern New York. More than 3 million baits have been distributed since 1998 covering a 5,953 square-mile area. Since the initiation of the program, the number of reported terrestrial rabies cases in the target area has decreased by more than 98 percent.

Specific projects conducted by New Mexico WS include, protecting endangered southwest willow flycatchers from nest parasitism and lesser prairie chickens, a federal candidate species, from predation; and managing damage caused by beavers, pigeons, starlings, and other wildlife.

Major Assistance Activities:

- Reducing double-crested cormorant impacts to fisheries and rare species
- Reducing public health threats from raccoon rabies
- Protecting public safety and aircraft operations from wildlife hazards at airports
- Protecting property and crops from damage caused by resident Canada geese
- Protecting property and public health from damage caused by large, urban crow roosts

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to New York:

- Evaluating techniques for reducing double-crested cormorant impacts to fisheries
- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Documenting starling facilitated livestock diseases/reducing damage at dairy barns.
- Understanding rabies vector ecology and controlling wildlife vectors of rabies
- Understanding urban rat ecology

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or direct assistance, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts scientific research across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Agriculture Resources—Estimated costs associated with bird damage and damage prevention for the aquaculture industry exceeds $17 million annually. WS conducts research to determine the magnitude of the problem and develop methods to reduce damage by fish-eating birds to southeastern catfish, baitfish, and crawfish production. The same research will provide additional strategies for the management of cormorants on sport fish in New York.

New York has a number of breeding areas, including Lake Champlain, Lake Ontario, and Oneida Lake, for colonial waterbirds such as gulls and cormorants. These birds pose threats to public health and safety, crops, property, and natural resources. Since 1998 when WS began participating in a cooperative harassment program to reduce the impact of cormorants on fisheries in Oneida Lake, cormorant damage has been dramatically reduced. More importantly, the number of cormorants migrating to the area each fall have been reduced by as much as 98 percent.

Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports—Bird strikes with airplanes cost civil aviation more than $500 million annually in the United States and pose a hazard to flight crews and passengers. From 1979 to 2004, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) reported between 80 and 315 aircraft collisions each year with birds at John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport. During this time, bird strikes at JFK resulted in 90 aborted takeoffs and at least 70 incidents resulting in substantial damage.

WS researchers define the cutting edge of wildlife damage management science and are constantly working to improve existing management strategies in order to address problems such as bird collisions with aircraft. Through research conducted at JFK, WS scientists demonstrated the effectiveness of brush removal on airport grounds and the importance of regular mowing of grassland areas to reduce the number of birds and small mammals using the airport to feed and loaf. In response to these findings, PANYNJ launched a major shift in vegetation management at the airport.

Initiating a cooperative, integrated approach, WS helped to reduce laughing gull strikes (the species of primary concern) at JFK by 76 percent to 99 percent from 1992 through 2004. Bird strikes by 3 other problematic gull species were reduced from 48 percent to 84 percent during the same time period. A 99 percent reduction in laughing gull strikes was achieved for the first time in 2000 when only three such strikes were reported at JFK compared with an average of 157 strikes each year from 1988-1990.

Urban Human Health and Safety—Canada geese threaten public health and safety, property, and crops. The current Canada goose population in New York is approximately 200,000 birds and that number is expected to double every five years. WS biologists have implement two county-wide cooperative non-lethal hazing programs in Central and Southern New York. WS researchers are working to understand the efficacy of non-lethal hazing techniques. Biologists also provide seminars, one-on-one advice over the telephone, and other on-site management assistance to New Yorkers experiencing problems with Canada geese. The New York program addresses more than 200 requests for assistance with geese each year.

Major Cooperators:

- The New York State Departments' of Agriculture, Health and Environmental Conservations
- The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey
- Oneida Lake Association
- The Cities of Albany, Troy, Utica, Colonie, Monroe and Auburn
- Cornell University Diagnostic Laboratory
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Plum Island Animal Disease Center
- Orange and Nassua Counties
- Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority

Looking to the Future

WS has received requests for the development of an integrated management program to reduce consumption and contamination of animal feed by starlings and other birds at dairy barns. In addition, urban winter crow roosts are emerging as a unique problem for city residents, resulting in problems caused by droppings, noise, odor, and fear associated with zoonotic diseases. West Nile virus, which was first documented in North America in New York in 1999, has since spread to every county in the State. Raccoon rabies also remains a health concern. Finally, concern has been expressed by agricultural producers over the potential introduction of foot-and-mouth disease and chronic wasting disease into New York. WS has the expertise to assist with this vast array of emerging wildlife damage issues.

New York Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.